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The Ecology of the Spoken Word: Amazonian Storytelling and Shamanism among the Napo Runa by Michael A. Uzendoski and Edith Felicia Calapucha-Tapuy (review)

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Part 3 is heterogenous. It has the obligatory chapter on major African phyla (Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo, Khoisan), reviewing their rather colorful history with Joseph H. Greenberg at the center. Dimmendaal expels Mande and Dogon from Niger-Congo, and Songhay, Koman, and Gumuz from Nilo-Saharan, and breaks Khoisan up into three unrelated families. These decisions are reasonable in the context of current thinking, though the expulsions will make it harder for some Africanists (including your hapless servant, a Songhay and Dogon specialist) to know which language-family conferences to attend. This is flanked by a chapter on the role of typology in historical linguistics and one on language and history (words and things).

In the final chapter, "Some Ecological Properties of Language Development," Dimmendaal plunges into the fray on speciation, evolutionary teleology, punctuated equilibrium, spread and residual zones, and esoterogeny (self-inflicted complexification). His favorite biological concept, however, is "self-organising principles" (e.g., p. 365). I fear that this concept, as Dimmendaal uses it, mixes two distinct processes. First, widely separated and unrelated languages, like corporations and other complex structures that must operate effectively, tend to develop similar organizational features. Dimmendaal correctly points out that we need not resort to a Chomskyan black box to account for such similarities. Secondly, a specific language defends its own heavy investments in morphosyntactic patterns, even idiosyncratic ones, by repeated formal renewal of these configurations using new morphological material. Both processes are central to the evolution of languages, and Dimmendaal shows considerable insight in recognizing their importance, but they should be teased apart.

The Ecology of the Spoken Word: Amazonian Storytelling and Shamanism among the Napo Runa. MICHAEL A. UZENDOSKI and EDITH FELICIA CALAPUCHA-TAPUY. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2012. Pp. xvi + 245. \$50.00 (cloth).

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This book is about Ecuadorian Napo Quichua storytelling practices and the philosophies about the cosmos that are embedded within these events. The two authors, one of whom is an Ecuadorian Napo Quichua and the other an American, lovingly present a range of storytelling performances that focus on how different beings, including humans, animals, plants, and places, relate to each other. Throughout, their concern is to highlight the aesthetic dimensions of these events. Hymesian verse analysis, grammatical patterns, drawings, and attention to musicality, among other techniques, are all employed to this end. As most of the performers are their relatives, the authors have a rare intimacy with the prosaic ways in which these sorts of mythological accounts are woven into and shape contemporary life. As a result, the reader gets a glimpse of Upper Amazonian mythology as vital, living tradition told by elders at the riverside as well as by university-educated narrators at folklore celebrations and musicians singing in a new genre of modern electronic dance music. The book offers particularly interesting discussions of the role of the body in Quichua storytelling, Napo Quichua ideas about different modes of communication, and orientations to ecology, as well as insights on the project of translation more generally.

Combining an ethnopoeitic approach that focuses on the aesthetics of communication with the large literature that stresses the centrality of the body in Amazonian cosmology, the authors treat Quichua storytelling as "somatic poetry," defined as a way of creating multimodal embodied works of art "by listening, feeling, smelling, seeing, and tasting of natural subjectivities, not just those emanating from human speech or from the human

mind" (p. 23). Throughout, attention is also given to the indigenous theories about the body's potency. Quichua concepts such as *samay* 'breath; soul substance' are discussed at several points in relation to storytelling. Storytelling, for example, is understood to create "a stirring of the soul" (p. 22). Especially interesting, with respect to gender, is the discussion in chapter 4 of *ushay*, the power that women feel in their flesh when they sing shamanic songs about animals. Culturally specific ideas about the body and its power are then linked to classic concepts in anthropology. Many of the storytelling events, for example, ultimately bring a sense of cosmological *communitas*, of the sort discussed by Victor Turner.

Their approach also takes the authors directly into culturally specific assumptions about communication. Particularly interesting are Napo Quichua ideas about the power of music and song to connect human subjectivities to the subjectivities of various sorts of nonhuman beings, including landscapes. In chapter 1, shamanic song (along with plant vapors) channels the power of the forest to the patient. Chapter 2 focuses on how telling and singing stories about the mythic flood allows present-day people to come into contact with chthonic subjectivities. In chapter 3, centered on myths about celestial bodies and their relation to humans, the celestial beings come alive through the musicality of the human voice. Chapter 4 deals with how song connects women in a shamanistic way to the power of birds. Attention is given in each case to how different subjectivities have different communicative perspectives. With this focus they creatively bring "perspectivist" formulations of cosmology, i.e., the idea that all living things possess subjectivities and have different perspectives based on their bodily form, into dialogue with linguistic anthropological concerns about the nature of communication and aesthetic performance.

Humanity's relationship to the ecological world is a consistent theme developed in each of the chapters. In contrast to the idea that humans are rightfully situated in a hierarchical position in which they dominate nature, extracting resources from nature at will, an alternative view is expressed in Napo Quichua mythology. Myths communicate a sense for human limitations, for humility, and for human dependence on and interconnection with the ecological world as well as the idea that human destiny is transformation. Myths about Napo Quichua culture heroes such as the Moon, the One-Eyed Anaconda Sun, the Princess, the Twins, and Iluku (the mother of the Twins) are appreciated as creating "a complex axis mundi of mythological relations" linking the human world to other dimensions and as narratives that force the listener to think about his or her own relationship to the world (p. 171). Electronic dance music called Runa Paju is also creatively analyzed in chapter 8 as doing similar sorts of work. The authors convincingly treat this new genre as a transformation of older Quichua storytelling not only with respect to formal dimensions, but also with respect to its message and the way it opens a connection with spirits, plants, and animals for humans.

The question of how to best translate storytelling events is one of the book's overarching concerns. Each chapter is an exploration in how to best convey the elements of different storytelling events, including the imagery, music, and gestures, and each chapter is organized slightly differently in order to foreground some of these elements over others. To enhance translations and communicate the visual lifeworlds of storytelling, the book is also paired with a companion website featuring videos or audio recordings of the narrators, a feature especially useful for the classroom. Paradoxically, I found that reading the book actually gave me the sense that I was approximating the emotional tone of the original performances more closely than did the video and audio files. This would likely not be the case for a Quichua speaker, however. The one exception is the videos of the Runa Paju artists' performances, events that are a fascinating blend of tradition and electronic music, high heels and snakeskin vests, shamanic cures, and cell phones. With respect to these videos, the phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" comes to

mind—though again, without the book’s discussion of these performances, the uninformed viewer would likely not be able to understand exactly how these shows are a continuation of traditional forms. The authors say they strive “to create English poems imbued with the spirit of Quichua aesthetics” (p. 16) and to produce translations that address the textuality of place and how the self is defined in another culture. In all of these goals, the authors most definitely succeed.